

# Teaching Tips

December 10  
Bible Study Guide 2

## Words You Should Know

**A. Prophets** (Act 13:1) *prophetes* (Gk.)—Foretellers, inspired speakers, interpreters.

**B. Ministered** (v. 2) *leitourgeo* (Gk.)—To perform religious or charitable functions.

## Teacher Preparation

### Unifying Principle—Facing Opposition.

Sometimes we are at a loss when unexpected events interfere with our goals. How can we keep our commitments and forge ahead? Empowered by their faith in Jesus, Paul and Barnabas preached and taught about Jesus despite a false prophet's efforts to deter them.

**A.** Pray for lesson clarity and understanding.

**B.** Read the passage in several translations.

**C.** Read the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.

## O—Open the Lesson

**A.** Open with prayer, including the Aim to Change.

**B.** Introduce today's lesson title: "Faith to Discern."

**C.** Tell the students to read the In Focus story silently, and then discuss it.

## P—Present the Scriptures

**A.** Ask for volunteers to read the Focal Verses aloud.

**B.** Use The People, Places, and Times; Background; Search the Scriptures; and In Depth sections to clarify the verses.

## E—Explore the Meaning

**A.** Have the students read the Lesson in Our Society section.

**B.** Divide the class into groups to respond to the Discuss the Meaning and Make It Happen sections. Have the students choose a representative to report their response.

## N—Next Steps for Application

**A.** Summarize the lesson.

**B.** Ask the students if they have any take-away thoughts that they would like to share.

**C.** Close with prayer.

## Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Faith to Discern

Song: "Break Every Chain" by Tasha Cobbs

Devotional Reading: Psalm 146

# Faith to Discern

**Bible Background • ACTS 13:1–12**  
**Printed Text • ACTS 13:1–12 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 146**

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: CONTRAST the motives and sources of power of Paul and his companions with those of Elymas; APPRECIATE what it signified for Paul to pronounce blindness on another; and COMMIT to a season of prayer and fasting before embarking on a new ministry.



In Focus



Jeremy didn't know what he was going to do. He had just graduated from college and was feeling torn. He had job offers in two cities. One city was a tech hub and known for all of its great culture and night life. The other city was economically depressed and run down. Jeremy had pursued his degree in computer science mainly for the money, but as he had been on this new journey of following Christ, the money hadn't been that appealing.

The job in the economically depressed area was with a non-profit helping kids learn computer science. He had never thought about his skills actually being used to help others. At the same time, he reasoned he could help others with all the money he would make at the other job. Both choices seemed like reasonable options that God would honor. Jeremy didn't know what to do.

He spoke with his mentor, Paul, who encouraged him to fast and bring the matter to God in prayer. After several days of fasting and worshipping God, Jeremy read Romans 10:14, and the words jumped out at him: "...how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?" (NLT). He realized those were God's words to him personally, and he knew right then that he should accept his call to ministry in the economically depressed area. He didn't know where it would lead, but he knew it was the right choice.

*In this lesson, we will look at how Paul and Barnabas heard the voice of the Holy Spirit. How do you discern the next steps God wants you to take?*

## Keep in Mind

"The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (from Acts 13:2).



“The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (from Acts 13:2).

## Focal Verses

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**KJV** Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus:

7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him.

10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

**NLT** Acts 13:1 Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called “the black man”), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul.

2 One day as these men were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.”

3 So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.

4 So Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit. They went down to the seaport of Seleucia and then sailed for the island of Cyprus.

5 There, in the town of Salamis, they went to the Jewish synagogues and preached the word of God. John Mark went with them as their assistant.

6 Afterward they traveled from town to town across the entire island until finally they reached Paphos, where they met a Jewish sorcerer, a false prophet named Bar-Jesus.

7 He had attached himself to the governor, Sergius Paulus, who was an intelligent man. The governor invited Barnabas and Saul to visit him, for he wanted to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas, the sorcerer (as his name means in Greek), interfered and urged the governor to pay no attention to what Barnabas and Saul said. He was trying to keep the governor from believing.

9 Saul, also known as Paul, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he looked the sorcerer in the eye.

10 Then he said, “You son of the devil, full of every sort of deceit and fraud, and enemy of all that is good! Will you never stop perverting the true ways of the Lord?”

**12** Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

**11** Watch now, for the Lord has laid his hand of punishment upon you, and you will be struck blind. You will not see the sunlight for some time.” Instantly mist and darkness came over the man’s eyes, and he began groping around begging for someone to take his hand and lead him.

**12** When the governor saw what had happened, he became a believer, for he was astonished at the teaching about the Lord.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Antioch (of Syria).** The city of Antioch was founded during the period of Seleucid Syria. It was situated on the south bank of the Orontes River. Antioch was a very diverse city and was one of the first places the church was initiated outside of Jerusalem. Antioch is where the followers of the Way were first called Christians.

**Cyprus.** Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean Sea, approximately 110 miles long and 50 miles wide. The island’s coast is lined with numerous natural harbors. Cyprus’ location in the northeastern Mediterranean made it an ideal meeting place for ships from Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Palestine. Barnabas was originally from the island of Cyprus.

## Background

The church in Antioch was one of the first churches where Gentiles came to faith in large numbers. Although Peter had previously preached to Gentiles in Joppa, Antioch is where ordinary believers began to preach the Good News to them. As a result, a “great number believed,” prompting the church in Jerusalem to send Barnabas to look after the fledgling church and evaluate its work. Barnabas in turn invited Paul to come and teach alongside him at Antioch. Over time, the church grew spiritually and in number.

As they fasted and worshiped, the Holy Spirit spoke, more than likely through one of the prophets or teachers gathered there. The word from God was that Paul and Barnabas should be set apart to be sent to the Gentiles. This was in fulfillment of God’s call on Paul’s life as detailed in Acts 9:13–16. Here we learn how God instructs Paul and Barnabas as they step out in faith for this special work.

## At-A-Glance

1. Summoned by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1–3)
2. Sent by the Holy Spirit (vv. 4–8)
3. Saved by the Power of the Spirit (vv. 9–12)

## In Depth

### 1. Summoned by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1–3)

In spite of the fact that they had identified prophets and teachers, the church at Antioch sought guidance from the Holy Spirit through prayer and fasting. What an impressive line-up of leaders who would embark upon this journey of fasting, praying, and seeking the Holy Spirit for direction! Paul is listed last, but God has a plan for his life, as we shall see later in the book of Acts.

These five leaders spent time fasting and worshiping to seek the will of God. While they were doing this, the Holy Spirit began to reveal His will. The text says, “Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work” He had for them to do. They continued praying and fasting even after they received this word from the Holy Spirit, showing that they were careful to rely on God throughout this new venture. The Antioch leaders laid hands on them. This was a commissioning or sending out of Barnabas and Paul so they would accomplish God’s will.

### **2. Sent by the Holy Spirit (vv. 4–8)**

When the Holy Spirit summons, the Spirit also sends. It is safe to say that Barnabas and Paul were on their first missionary journey, but they were not novices (they were in ministry for eight years in Antioch). The church sent them away to do the Lord’s work with the Gentiles. They visited several places (vv. 4–6), first Seleucia, and then the island of Cyprus. On Cyprus, they visited Salamis and preached in various synagogues. However, they decided to travel west to Paphos, the location of the Roman colony on the island. There they found a Jewish sorcerer and a false prophet named Elymas, also known as Barjesus. Elymas had attached himself to Sergius Paulus, who was the proconsul (or governor) of the area, who sent for Barnabas and Paul, because he wanted to hear the Word of God.

When Elymas heard Paul and Barnabas’ message, he sought to turn Sergius Paulus away from the faith. Elymas was trying to hinder the work of the Lord and actually told Sergius Paulus not to listen to anything they said. He must have felt threatened by the power of God working through their lives and the Gospel message. Their words would have shown that Elymas was a false prophet. Many times when doing God’s work, those who are intimidated will try to keep people from hearing because the Word of God has power.

### **3. Saved by the Power of the Spirit (vv. 9–12)**

Paul, full of the Holy Spirit, rebuked Barjesus. The text says he looked him dead in his eye and said, “You son of the devil, full of every sort of deceit and fraud, and enemy of all that is good” (vv. 9–10). Paul was furious at Elymas, and was not going to let him continue to stop the power of the Holy Spirit from ministering to Sergius Paulus. Paul saw that Elymas intended to stop any good thing that God wanted to do; he had no good in him.

Paul declared that Elymas would be blind for a season; he needed to know that he was not in charge or in control. After this, Sergius Paulus believed. He was convinced by the Word of God and the power that backed it up. Since Sergius Paulus was the governor, his voice was very influential on the island as a Gentile believer. Paul and Barnabas might have possibly looked on this as confirmation that God had sent them to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. What are the benefits of entering into a time of corporately seeking God (Acts 13:1–3)?
2. Why was the deputy astonished at the teaching about the Lord (vv. 9–12)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

Paul and Barnabas relied on the Holy Spirit prior to and during their first missionary journey. What does it mean for you to rely on the Holy Spirit?

### **Lesson in Our Society**

Today, fasting and times of seeking God are not talked about enough. Our churches are filled with those who would like to receive God’s power without waiting in His presence. Concerts and fund-raisers seem more appealing than actually seeking God and what He wants. The voice of our favorite preacher is

louder in our ears than God’s voice. Everyone has his or her own idea, agenda, and plan for living. Fasting especially seems like a relic of a bygone era.

In earlier times, fasting and praying were a regular part of the church’s life. Now many are enjoying prosperity and forgetting the God who made us prosperous. In many historic Black churches, fasting and praying were not for special people, but a part of normal Christian life. More than ever, it’s essential that we get back to seeking God and worshiping Him just for who He is. Then we can discern what needs to happen in our lives and God can give us direction.

### Make It Happen

- Choose a time to fast in the next week and seek God’s presence.
- List out three ways God has spoken to you in the past. If you are not sure, discover three ways God has spoken to others.
- Write down how God has used you in the lives of others and reflect on how He wants to use you today.

### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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### Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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### More Light on the Text

Acts 13:1–12

**1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.**

The early church’s leadership was diverse. Barnabas was introduced to us earlier in the book of Acts at the end of chapter 4. He was a Levite from the island of Cyprus. Barnabas, whose name means “son of encouragement,” convinced the disciples to accept Paul’s conversion as genuine. Saul here is the same Paul (v. 9) who would go on to write much of the New Testament, still going by his Hebrew name while among fellow Hebrews.

The word “prophets” refers to “one who, moved by the Spirit of God and hence His organ or spokesman, solemnly declares to men what he has received by inspiration, including future events, and in particular such as relate to the cause and kingdom of God and to human salvation.” In other words, these people speak for God Himself and are to represent Him and do as He instructs them.

We hear little about the three other leaders of the Antioch church. Two of the men here are likely from Africa, though we do not know much else about them. Simeon was called Niger, which means “black” in Latin, probably alluding to his dark complexion. Of Lucius, we know only that he was from the city of Cyrene in North Africa. Manaen is Greek for the Hebrew name Menahem, meaning “comforter.” In Greek, the word for “brought up with” is *suntrophos* (**SOON-trof-os**) and can be translated as “foster brother,” the title given

to boys around the same age as the prince who were raised with him in the royal court.

**2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.**

In the Greek, “they ministered” is *leitourgeo* (**lay-toor-GEH-oh**), and in this context refers to prayer, instructing others in the way of salvation, or some other way of working for the Lord. Their ministry was complemented with fasting—either entirely, if the fast lasted only one day, or from customary and choice nourishment, if it continued several days. Therefore, they were found fasting and praying, which made them sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

In the midst of carrying out their leadership and ministry responsibilities, these men were instructed by the Holy Spirit to appoint Paul and Barnabas to the work to which God had called them. It is worth noting that these men were ministering “to the Lord.” They understood to whom their service was to be directed. Subsequently, they ministered to God’s people as to the Lord.

**3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.**

Having been instructed by the Spirit to appoint Barnabas and Paul to their work, the leaders at Antioch laid hands on their brothers and sent them away with their blessing. The leaders sent them off as representatives of the entire body; thus, through its leaders, the whole church at Antioch gave its blessings to these two missionaries and sent them to the work.

**4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. 5 And when**

**they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.**

Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us here that the Holy Spirit sent Barnabas and Paul forth on their missionary journey. The emphasis, of course, is on the calling of the Spirit to the work of ministry. Ultimately, the Lord calls people into ministry. The church should discern if the call is valid and then commission for service those whose calling is from the Lord.

Having been commissioned, Paul and Barnabas set out for the island of Cyprus, about sixty miles west of the coast of Syria. It is the third largest island in the Mediterranean. Barnabas and Paul most likely chose it as the starting point for their missionary journey because it was close to Antioch, had a large Jewish population, and was familiar territory, being the home of Barnabas. They preached the Word first in the city of Salamis, which was on the east coast of the island. They began in the synagogue, not because their ministry was intended exclusively for Jews, but because this was a good bridge to the Gentile community; here they would encounter Gentiles who were already familiar with and respectful toward God.

John (also known as Mark) was the cousin of Barnabas. He traveled with the two men as an attendant early in the first missionary journey. He would later be the cause of a split between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36–41). Afterward, he would be reconciled to Paul (2 Timothy 4:11).

**6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: 7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. 8 But**

**Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.**

Advancing God's purposes is not without its challenges. From Salamis, Paul and Barnabas traveled all the way to the west coast of the island, spreading the Gospel. In the city of Paphos, they encountered the false prophet Barjesus, also called Elymas.

The name "Barjesus" means "son of salvation," which he was not. He was a magician who falsely claimed to be a medium of divine revelation. He had somehow attached himself to the governor at that time, Sergius Paulus. The text tells us that Sergius Paulus was a prudent man (v. 7). "Prudent" in the Greek is *sunetos* (**soo-neh-TOCE**) and means "intelligent, having understanding, wise, learned." Sergius Paulus had either heard about Paul and Barnabas' teaching or had heard them preach the Gospel himself, and so summoned them in order to hear further explanation of the Gospel. Elymas, no doubt afraid of losing the governor's favor, opposed Paul and Barnabas and tried to keep Sergius from believing the Gospel.

**9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him. 10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? 11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.**

Paul "set his eyes" on Elymas (v. 9) and said, "O full of all subtilty and all mischief" (v. 10). "Subtilty," in the Greek, is *dolos* (**DO-los**) and means "craft, deceit, guile." "Mischief" translates the Greek word *rhadiourgia* (**rah-dee-ur-GEE-ah**), which can refer to laziness, but in

this context means fraud or unscrupulousness. Then Paul severely rebuked Elymas for trying to hinder the governor from coming to faith in Christ. The Scripture says that Paul's rebuke was the result of his being filled with the Holy Spirit, as Stephen was when he spoke before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:10). Indeed, throughout the book of Acts, we hear of the filling of the Spirit as the people of God accomplish the work of ministry.

Paul began with a rebuke centered on the wickedness of Elymas' character. By his attempts to sway the governor from the truth, he had shown that he was not, in fact, a medium of divine revelation, but a son of the devil whose heart was filled with deceit and who never ceased in confusing the way of salvation. He was an enemy of the Gospel of Christ. Thus, because Elymas had attempted to blind the governor to the truth of the Gospel, he would suffer the Lord's judgment of physical blindness for some time. We are not told how long, nor does it seem that Elymas was told either. The results demonstrated that this judgment was from the Lord; Elymas was immediately struck blind and began to fumble about, looking for someone to guide him. What a warning this text is to those who would oppose the Gospel! God does not look lightly on attempts to hinder the spread of His truth. He will respond to those who seek to destroy the work of the Gospel in the lives of those whom He is calling to Himself.

**12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.**

Elymas had tried to deter the governor from the faith, but the Lord used His judgment on Elymas to bring the governor to faith. The governor was so amazed by what he saw that he believed the teaching of the Lord. Notice that the text does not say that he believed Paul's

teaching, because God was using Paul to teach the Word of the Lord. Sergius Paulus believed that what he had been told by Elymas was indeed false, and the message that he heard from Barnabas and Paul was true.

**Sources:**

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### Say It Correctly

Manaen. ma-NA-in.  
Elymas. eh-LEE-mahs.  
Sergius Paulus. ser-JEE-us pah-LUS.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

Joshua Discerned as New Leader  
(Deuteronomy 31:14–15, 23; 34:9)

### TUESDAY

Eli Senses God’s Call to Samuel  
(1 Samuel 3:1–9)

### WEDNESDAY

Test the Spirits  
(1 John 4:1–6)

### THURSDAY

Blind Man Discerns Jesus as Prophet  
(John 9:13–17)

### FRIDAY

Paul’s Strategy: Jews First, Then Greeks  
(Romans 1:8–12, 16–17)

### SATURDAY

Door of Faith Opened to Gentiles  
(Acts 14:21–28)

### SUNDAY

Spirit-filled Leadership Discernment  
(Acts 13:1–12)

## Notes

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